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# Duality and fallibility in practices of the self: The 'inclusive subject' in diversity training

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## Abstract

The concept of 'inclusion' has been gaining ground in a field known as equality and diversity work. Scholars have begun to both theorise what this concept means as a normative goal and to critically examine how it is mobilised in organisational practice. This paper contributes to the latter conversation by asking what comes to count as 'doing inclusion' at the level of the individual. I examine the practices of diversity training in UK organisations, in which diversity practitioners seek to transform their trainees into people who will act inclusively toward others, asking: Who is the 'inclusive subject' that is being constructed – imagined, sought and legitimised – through diversity training? What are the conditions of possibility that shape the emergence of this subject? And what are the possibilities that this subject affords to marginalised groups struggling for recognition within organisations? The analysis mobilises Foucault's notions of power/knowledge, discipline, and of practices of the self to describe and discuss the performance of inclusive subjectivity in the context of diversity training in the UK. The practices described are found to be facilitated by two key forms of knowledge about how the subject is characterised: duality and fallibility.

## Keywords

diversity, inclusion, equality, subjectivity, Foucault

## Doing inclusion

The terms 'diversity' and 'diversity management' have become a common feature in UK organisations over the last thirty years, gradually displacing the terms more closely associated with 'equality' such as 'equal

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opportunities' in the UK context (Kirtton and Greene, 2009; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000) and affirmative action in the US (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998). Appropriated from the discipline of biology (Litvin, 1997), in organisational life the narrowly-defined term 'diversity' refers to the heterogeneity within a defined population – usually senior management, employees or customers - with regards to demographic or social-group characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, age, sexual identity, and religion. But wider than heterogeneity alone, 'diversity' as broadly defined is more ambiguous: it is a discourse about difference; a set of arguments and ideas about what the world is like, who people are, how they relate to one another, and how the world should be otherwise. The discourse of diversity centres on the differences between people and what this means for how we organise, but transforms in its focus for different times and places (see for example Cooke and Saini, 2010; Jones, 2000; Shen et al., 2010). The field of critical diversity studies therefore examines how discourses shape which differences are seen to be salient in a given context, and what, if anything, it is advised that people in organisations should do about them. Work in this field has therefore been another important step towards acknowledging who is currently able, or allowed, to participate in organisations; what the terms of their success are; and who remains sidelined.

Over recent years, the term 'inclusion' has been gaining prominence in both practitioner and scholarly literature. Inclusion reformulates both the concepts of diversity and equality: for some, inclusion is articulated by positioning diversity as *passé*, eclipsing diversity and the next logical next step in a linear progression (see Oswick and Noon, 2014). For others, 'inclusion' articulates itself as a plug to a hole in the concept of diversity; an essential and final addition to a two-part recipe where diversity is 'a necessary precursor to inclusion' and inclusion is the 'required antecedent of diversity' (Oswick and Noon, 2014: 26; see also Chavez and Weisinger, 2008; Mor Barak, 2015; Oswick and Noon, 2012). Both Roberson (2006) and Nkomo (2014) describe 'inclusion' as a process by which environments are created that enable all individuals to fully participate in organisations, and where no person can say 'What about me?' (Nkomo, 2014: 589). It is a discourse therefore that is oriented towards the accommodation of the individual in terms of their unique combination of needs, preferences, and skills. I suggest that where diversity is an existing or desired state of heterogeneity, inclusion appears to indicate

a process through which this state can be achieved, managed, and maintained - it is positioned as the *verb* of a set of discourses that we might usefully refer to be about 'organising difference'.<sup>2</sup>

Within critical management studies, scholarly criticism of how inclusion becomes manifest in organisational practices is gathering momentum, asking: who is included? What is it that people are being included in? and, who remains excluded? (see Adamson et al., 2016). Such questions about what 'doing inclusion' entails are usefully informed by a consideration of what organisational practices seek to achieve, that is, what the implicit or explicit goals are in how the organisation articulates inclusion and the practices that are enacted in its name. The question 'what are we meant to do to be inclusive?' may be asked at a number of different levels – state, organisation, or individual. Interventions at the organisational level have garnered attention with regards to the effect that organisational relations have on trust and perceptions of supportiveness from marginalised groups (Capell et al., 2017; Ely et al., 2012), the role of leadership in perceptions of inclusion (Cottrill et al., 2010), and the relational nature of practices necessary in creating an inclusive workplace (Janssens and Zanoni, 2007). The question of what individuals do, or should do, has been less present in critical discussions. Exceptions to this often approach inclusion from the view of group dynamics: for example, Gagnon and Collinson's (2017) study in which teams perform inclusion through resisting the reproduction of difference as something problematic, and framing difference as a form of resource, and Shore et al. (2011) whose review of literature on diverse work groups argues that a combination of recognising uniqueness and belonging is a requirement of inclusion. This absence may in part be explained by early concerns that were voiced, as the era of diversity was ushered in, about the individualism inherent in the approach – scholars warned that as difference becomes more about individual talents and needs, historical patterns of social disadvantage become erased (Ahmed, 2007b). It may be, therefore, that it has hitherto been of greater importance for scholars to minimise discussions about the individual in favour of emphasising the ways in which discrimination and inequality are perpetuated through embedded organisational power relations.

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<sup>2</sup> This set would include discourses of equality, equal opportunities, and affirmative action that are used in some national contexts more than others. Though distinct, these terms represent sets of ideas about organising difference that overlap in places and that shift from context to context. For example, in the UK, where the study for this paper was located, usage of term 'equality' has waned over the last twenty or so years in favour of 'diversity', though it has been argued that the social justice arguments connected with the former have remained present alongside the business-focussed arguments that are closely connected with the latter (Kirtton and Greene, 2009, Noon, 2007).

The individual has been present in the literature predominantly in terms of resistance: Zanoni and Janssens (2007) discuss how minority ethnic employees can resist attempts to manage their difference through strategies of 'micro-resistance', and Swan and Fox (2010) discuss how those individuals charged with responsibilities for advising on organising difference – diversity practitioners – can be both co-opted by management and resist co-optation in different contexts. Diversity practitioners have also featured as key individuals who are tasked with seeking transformation of their organisations (Ahmed, 2007c, 2012; Kirton and Greene, 2009; Kirton et al., 2007; Jones, 2007, and Tatli, 2011). These writings have explored the challenges that these often-marginalised change agents face, and the strategies that they employ to meet such challenges. Because diversity practitioners are frequently the ones responsible for developing new practices and persuading others to change how they do things, they are a key source of knowledge about inclusion: diversity practitioners are known to shape the discourses of organising difference within their local contexts (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004: 56) and thus what comes to count as inclusion.

Scholars have noted a relative dearth of research into how difference is manifested in practice within organisations and have called for further work on this (Ahmed and Swan, 2006). This is of particular importance because struggles within the discourse mean that diversity is something that is difficult to put into practice (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015). Much critical work on the discourse of diversity has focussed on the arguments, or 'cases', that are made for a change. Two cases – the business case and the social justice case – have been analysed as complex and shifting sets of arguments (Liff, 1997; Prasad et al., 2011; Zanoni and Janssens, 2015); as being complementary in some contexts (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010); and as conflicting but coexisting in others (Dickens, 1994; Jones, 2007; Kirton et al., 2007). The way in which these cases are made is one important way in which diversity is practiced, but some have issued a call to examine how diversity becomes enacted in other ways too. For example, Ahmed (2007c, 2012) has reflected on the process of writing diversity policies in higher education and what these documents often fail to change, Mirza (2006) has made a critique of diversity auditing practices, and Swan (2010) has examined the problematic implications of the 'mosaic' image as a metaphor for diversity. Diversity training is therefore a popular way in which organisations respond to equality legislation and operationalise the diversity agenda (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2007), and it is on this organisational practice that the paper focuses.

Scholars have begun to address the mechanics of training around organising difference since the turn to diversity: Swan (2009) theorises diversity training as a heteroglossic space in which different languages are drawn together; this multiplicity is employed to aid a critique of the status quo and to open up the possibility of organising differently. Swan's (2009) work, along with a detailed practitioner account written by Biccum (2007), highlights the key role that language plays in shaping and reshaping how people understand difference and the potential that this holds for changing social relations. This blurs the division between discourse (as saying) and practice (as doing), since communication is already a form of action that has material implications. Taking similar perspectives that foreground discourse, Jones (2007) discusses how different discourses are used to bring about action/change in different contexts, and Zanoni and Janssens (2004) examine the micro-dynamics of how language can essentialise, or avoid essentialising, difference.

This paper contributes to our knowledge of the practices of diversity by considering how individuals are taught to be inclusive of others in an organisational setting. It asks what practices come to show that a person that is inclusive of others. To do this, I examine what the employee is asked to do in order to be inclusive during diversity training in the UK. The research utilises a framework that evokes the idea that knowledge – as constructed and conveyed through language – is a form of practice. Such knowledge may be used, on the one hand, in seeking to influence others, to shape people's understandings of who they are and who they should strive to be; or, on the other hand, as a way of seeking to exercise freedom, through reflection and self-determination. This framework enables a delineation of the inclusive subject that is sought through diversity training in each given context, and a discussion about what this particular construction means for those who have historically been marginalised in organisations. It also allows for a consideration of what it means for the individual who is engaged in the practices that the training promotes. The framework draws from Foucault's discussions of power, knowledge, and practices of the self – concepts that I will discuss now.

## The self as practice

Foucault understands knowledge to be a constituent part of reality: as a way of accounting for how the world is, who we are, our relationships with the world and with one another. Knowledge creates different 'conditions of possibility', which are, in a Kantian sense, the conditions necessary to the emergence of particular phenomena (Bowie, 2003: 183). In this way, knowledge can be said to have power or, more precisely, to be a *part of* power.

In line with a more traditional view, power can of course create situations of what Foucault calls 'domination', where a person's 'margin for freedom' is limited (Foucault, 1994d: 292), but Foucault also emphasises that power is *productive* because it establishes certain possibilities within reality (Foucault, 1991: 194). The idea that power is manifest in the defining of what something or someone is and is not is referred to as 'power/knowledge'. This concept informs Foucauldian approaches to sociological study, shifting the focus from examining the symmetry or asymmetry of power relations (Lemke, 2010) to unpicking the constitutive 'capillaries' of power (Foucault, 1997: 27) that make any given phenomenon possible. Foucault applies this idea to subjectivity, arguing that that which makes a person more than a physical body is also produced through an incitement to discourse (Foucault, 1998: 17). That is, people are shaped by the different possibilities set out by knowledge much like other elements of our reality. This way of viewing the subject emphasises how the subject both 'is', and also how the subject changes, depending on their geo-historical location. A Foucauldian view of the subject does not rule out essential human qualities per se, but tends to take an interest in those aspects of the subject that are 'contingent, provisional, achieved' (Townley, 1993: 522) in a particular context. A Foucauldian approach to subjectivity therefore examines the forms of knowledge that are involved in constituting the subject and that are brought into play through interaction with other people and institutions: the practices that are involved in making sense of oneself.

Foucault's work has been highly influential with regards to the study of subjectivity. Where power/knowledge has tended to be mobilised to investigate how given groups are disciplined into certain ways of being, Foucault also offers a way of viewing the subject as more than passive slate to be inscribed upon. This concept of practices of the self appears in 'later Foucault' writings (Barratt, 2008) and is less used than other Foucauldian concepts in Critical Management Studies research. It has been deployed to emphasise that the subject has some active participation in the process of subject formation (Crane et al., 2008; McNabb, 2015), to discuss biopolitics in contemporary organising (Śliwa et al., 2013), and to elaborate Foucault's view of ethics (Munro, 2014; Randall and Muro, 2010; Siltaoja et al., 2014; Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013; Townley, 1994).

I prefer the term 'practices of the self' in this research, although terms connected with this appear throughout writings in the area, such as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1994a) and 'techniques of the self' (Dean, 2003: 194-195). 'Practices of the self' encompasses the idea of an habituating set of actions; describing enactments that shape the individual into a subject; the social manifestation of the physical body; and someone that is



meaningful to oneself and others.<sup>3</sup> This derives from an understanding that the subject is constructed through certain behaviours, patterns of speech, elements of appearance and so on, but, in producing these, is guided by the acceptance of certain forms of knowledge (as compared with others) about human nature, social relations, morality and so forth. The thesis of this paper therefore is guided by an assumption that the subject is constituted through the very expressions that are usually regarded as being the consequence, or effect, of an *a priori* self. Dean has argued that practices of the self can be seen in modern life both in fairly institutionalised domains, such as 'social work, medicine, education, established religion, forms of sport and physical culture'; and in more individual ones, such as 'cults of self-liberation and self-improvement' (1994: 153). In Foucault's analysis of Greco-Roman and Christian societies, the notion of practices of the self is used to explain how learning occurs through both theoretical and practical training (Foucault, 1999: para. 3). Such practices involved certain ways of speaking, writing and thinking that form the subject's relations to Truth, to obligation, and to ourselves and others (Foucault, 1983). Within this framework, I regard diversity training as offering a set of practices underlied by forms of knowledge, or one might say, assumptions, that give these particular practices relevance; knowledge that renders these practices desirable or even possible.

Where Swan (2009) explores the way that training can give rise to questioning the status quo and can create space for alternative ways of thinking – through what Foucault would call 'problematizing' (Foucault, 1994c) our ways of knowing – the present paper is interested in what knowledge is being offered to trainees to replace those being currently enacted. In asking trainees to undertake certain practices, diversity practitioners offer a programme of knowledge about who trainees are and how they should be in order to better relate to others who are in some respect different to them. In other words, the following analysis seeks to identify those practices that trainees are asked to enact as inclusive subjects. Foucault would see diversity training as a discursive space that facilitates subject formation, and the trainee within it as the locus of power/knowledge (Foldy, 2002: 104). At least to some extent, then, participants of diversity training are subject to forms of discipline. But, of course, in becoming subjects, people are not only subject to the power/knowledge of others. As Foucault states, resistance is a part of any relation of power (Foucault, 1998: 94-95): the very techniques of power give rise to the possibilities of resistance to it (Carette, 2013: 378). The particular manner in which

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, 'technology' can have a more specific meaning in Foucault's writings (see Dean, 1996).

trainees resist the programme of knowledge offered to them in diversity training is beyond the focus of this paper. In our later discussion, however, I touch upon the idea that in his analyses of Greco-Roman cultures, Foucault's practices of the self also offer a way to examine how an individual may resist disciplining forces and seek a closer relation to Truth (see Foucault, 1994a). In these writings, Foucault describes a reflexive process focussed on the knowledge one holds about oneself as being a practice of freedom. I consider therefore the extent of the relation to Truth that is possible, or likely, in the diversity practices examined.

## The study

The wider empirical study from which this paper derives was conducted in the UK and largely within the period October 2012 to October 2013. The purpose of the study was to explore the relations of power/knowledge involved in constructing the subject of the 'diversity practitioner' as a distinct type of organisational expert and the power/knowledge involved in seeking to shape the subject through diversity training. It is the latter part of the study which is presented here. In total, 37 diversity practitioners took part. Participant profiles varied regarding the sectors in which they worked and whether they were freelance consultants or held permanent positions in organisations.

Before moving on to outline the analytical process, I would like to introduce the key voices from whom I draw in the paper, giving a sense of their professional and organisational contexts: I observed five diversity practitioners conducting training and each was interviewed on a separate occasion. I observed Emily and James<sup>4</sup> conducting basic diversity training with care staff of an adult care provider in East London, both had backgrounds in community work and had been working in the field of diversity for 5 - 10 years and 20+ years respectively. Jamil was observed conducting training with customer-facing staff from a branch of a national advice service and had worked in diversity between 10 - 20 years working with public, private and charity organisations. I observed Ava on six separate occasions conducting and doing planning work for training on behalf of the local governing authority; she delivers sessions to prospective foster carers, parents, and school children. Catherine was observed delivering training to a public-sector organisation on UK equality law, namely the Equality Act

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<sup>4</sup> Individual participants have been pseudonyms rather than numbers to attempt to mitigate the objectifying effects of representing them in research. Formal and informal networks that exist among diversity practitioners in the UK means that the description of their roles and organisational affiliations in this research attempts to balance the need for anonymity with the advantages of providing information about research context (Reynolds, 1982: 62).

2010. This act protects marginalised groups of people according to nine ‘protected characteristics’ (race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and religion and belief) and sets out duties for public sector organisations to show due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations within their communities.<sup>5</sup> Of those diversity practitioners who were interviewed, and who are cited in the following analysis, only Gerry, Thomas, Amy, Rebecca, Joan, Susanne, and Charles had engaged in diversity work with public, private and charity sector organisations. John, Catherine and Ian worked predominantly in the public and charity sectors. Isabelle had predominantly worked with trade unions throughout her career. These diversity practitioners had varying but significant experience in the field of diversity ranging from 5 – 20+ years.<sup>6</sup> All of the diversity practitioners introduced here were working freelance at the time of the study, with the exception of Ava and Isabelle, who were employed by their organisations.

The diversity practitioners who participated in this research did so in two ways: through interviews with me, and in allowing me to observe their work. These ethnographic methods were deemed the most appropriate to ‘describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency’ of the practices of organising difference (Van Maanen, 1983: 9). From the outset, I was informed by a broadly post-structural approach that regards interview data as a set of accounts from which it is possible to derive information about how the research participants rationalise their relations to themselves and others (as opposed to deriving from the data as *a priori* Truth about the world). This relatively open framework allowed me to make use of ‘serendipitous findings’ (Miles, 1979: 597), and to gradually identify appropriate concepts with which to theorise the data through reading and inductive coding.

In interviews regarding training, I asked diversity practitioners to outline the activities that their training entailed, to think about what they were trying to achieve, and to describe how they could tell if they were successful or not. In observing diversity training, I was a participant observer in some sessions and a non-participant observer in others. The decision about whether I participated or not relied on the recommendation of the diversity practitioner conducting the session and their judgement about which option would cause the least disruption.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/review-of-public-sector-equality-duty-steering-group> 30/07/2016

<sup>6</sup> Those who had 20+ years of experience were Charles, Joan, Thomas, Susanne, Catherine, and Isabelle.

That is, I did not participate in training where there was already a high degree of familiarity among trainees – whilst recognising of course that my presence as a researcher would have had an impact in all contexts. In all observations I took immediate ‘jotted’ field notes (Emerson et al., 2011) on the activities that trainees were engaged in by the diversity practitioner: key phrases of spoken dialogue that struck me as illustrating the logics – or breaks in logic – of organising difference, along with a second level of notes that consisted of my own reflections on what I felt the training was attempting to achieve (see Kvale, 2008). Some participants were both interviewed and observed, and some only took part in one of these methods. In all, 33 interviews and 27 days’ worth of observation were conducted. In addition to this, 13 days’ worth of networking activities were observed, but this empirical material is not drawn upon explicitly in the present paper. Of the observations, ten instances were characterised by the conduct of training or activities directly related to training, for example planning and preparing materials. There was little guidance in the extant literature about how to delimit ‘diversity training’, since sessions tend to be highly tailored to their audiences (Bhavnani, 2001: 79-83). I took a broad view, and diversity training was defined within the research as those interactions that were discrete in terms of time and place and which the participants considered to be concerned with diversity work. This definition meant that training on a range of topics and for a range of audiences was observed helping to maximise the richness, nuance, and complexity of the empirical material generated (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 305).

The texts produced through interviewing and note-taking were treated as sources of knowledge, since knowledge is embedded in all social practices that ‘entail meaning’ (Hall, 1997: 291); that is, not only in spoken and written language, but also in the way we think and behave (Miller and Rose, 1990). As such, I utilised a discourse analytic approach which, although not codified as a unitary method (Carabine, 2001; Liamputtong, 2010; Miles, 1979), is ‘concerned with the relationship between speaking/writing as activity or social practices and the (re)production of meaning systems/orders of knowledge, the social actors involved in this, the rules and resources underlying these processes, and their consequences in social collectivities’ (Keller, 2013: 2). Following Foucault, I was chiefly concerned with ‘how truth effects are created within discourses’ (Kvale, 2008: 112). In so doing, I seek in the analysis presented below to veer away from doing two things: a) to make claims about an *a priori* subject and b) to propose any normative model for the ‘inclusive subject’. Instead, the contribution of the analysis is to elaborate what the practice of inclusive subjectivity looks like within a set of practices, and to

delineate its conditions of possibility. This allows for a theorisation of the origins and implications of a particular manifestation of the inclusive subject.

The interviews were first coded by the areas of practice that had loosely structured them, including 'becoming a diversity practitioner', 'training practices', 'challenges', and 'future plans'. Sections of this coded text that related to training were then grouped together with notes taken from observing training – this data was coded openly in an additional round and notes were taken on a) the different types of practices trainees were asked to engage in and b) the assumptions about the self that underlay these practices. This round of codes was used as a process of classifying the data and comparing elements of it in order to 'extract meaning' (Rubin and Rubin, 2011: 204); these codes identified the recommended actions that trainees were asked to engage in, the assumptions being made in this practice about who or how people are, and the location of responsibility for the given practice. It was during this iterative analytical process of coding, note taking, reading, and re-visiting the data that Foucault's practices of the self appeared to best characterise the approach with which I was analysing the data *and* helped to provide useful concepts with which to theorise the conditions of possibility and implications of the practices involved. I furthermore draw on Foucault's analysis of practices of the self in Greco-Roman and Christian societies in the analysis as a reflective counterpoint. The process of comparison between the speaking, writing and thinking practices in diversity training to practices of the self in other socio-historical contexts serves to unveil the functions of the former. In the following sections in which the findings are presented, I therefore combine analysis of the data with discussion of how the practices that emerge either contrast or bear similarities to practices of the self outlined in the work of Foucault and others. From the analysis, two forms of knowledge about the self recurred in making the practices of the inclusive subject both possible and desirable: these are what I have named 'duality' and 'fallibility'. These two ideas emerged from an analysis of the practices described in the data when identifying those things that are assumed true about the self in order to justify them. Although they emerged *post hoc*, it is useful to outline them in advance of setting out the full analysis in order that I can highlight and discuss them as we examine the practices in turn.

## The inclusive subject in diversity training

## Underlying characteristics of the inclusive subject in diversity training

The practices of the inclusive subject described below are made possible and desirable by two forms of knowledge that characterise it: duality and fallibility. These are now described in turn with some illustrative data to aid an understanding of how they come to underlie the practices described in the main body of the analysis that follows.

Duality indicates that the subject is constituted by elements that are more and less stable, and more and less under the subject's control. Frameworks used to conceptualise the self which share this idea were presented explicitly during two of the training sessions that I observed, and evoked implicitly in statements by diversity practitioners when talking about their aims in and approaches to diversity training. For instance, in the training session by James and Emily, an individual's values and beliefs - in their diagram, shown in Fig. 1, the term 'prejudices' is used - were presented as being 'below water'. These were talked about as being invisible, unconscious, and relatively stable. These core values, it was suggested, may have been formed and set during childhood, echoing theories such as Morris Massey's three-stage childhood development (1979: 7-12). Placed 'above water' are behaviours (represented in the figure by the term 'discrimination'). In one of her training sessions, Ava connected the subject's core concepts directly to the nine characteristics protected under UK equality law. She rationalised that these were protected because they are things about oneself that are "very difficult to change." Thomas was the most explicit his account that racist or sexist ideas are part of a surface layer of "learned stuff" as opposed to more fixed values. Values and beliefs were regarded as primary and stable, whilst behaviours/actions were secondary, changeable, and more under a person's control.

*[Insert Figure 1 about here]*

Fallibility, meanwhile, indicates that whilst some elements of the subject are within our control, we are likely to take problematic forms of action as we attempt to be inclusive of others. The idea that it was acceptable to make mistakes and that it is positive to recognise one's lack of knowledge was a recurring idea in interviews with diversity practitioners about their practice. For example, Thomas insisted, "none of us are...so in touch with it [diversity] that we can say that we're going to be perfect at all times [...]" "it's OK to change your mind, in fact it's

a really good thing.” During her training session with prospective foster carers, Ava praised a trainee who offered a story about “looking after a child with Afro-Caribbean hair and [expressing] their own ignorance and embarrassment [at not knowing how to do this], and [the] learning curve of looking after children” (field notes).

In the analysis that follows, the fundamental position that these two forms of knowledge take in characterising the inclusive subject becomes evident. The analysis draws on Foucauldian concepts of subject-formation in order to disentangle the possibilities of these practices in two senses: in terms of the conditions of their emergence, and in terms of what they afford to marginalised groups.

## Practices of the inclusive subject

### Speaking practices

Trainees were asked to speak for a number of purposes. Firstly, speaking represented a way of naming problems. This took place in different ways: Firstly, through criticism of the organisation – borrowing a scale from the Ofsted framework used in evaluating schools in the UK, Joan asked her trainees to reflect on their personal and organisational practices and to “grade” themselves in terms of “how you tackle discrimination, and how you foster good relationships between the different workers”. Secondly, as critique of other individuals – Susanne would ask trainees to read a tribunal case, “I want you look at them as a group manager and how you think the thing should have been handled internally so it didn’t tip into the court. Thirdly, people were asked to articulate problems as employees: how you feel you should have been treated properly”; or finally, as the person on the receiving end of discriminatory practices – Amy “[gets] people to think about a time when they were treated unfairly” and to reflect on why they think this happened. Ava and Jamil were also observed using this latter approach.

What is being encouraged in these instances is a practice of diagnosis. This practice has been recognised as an important part of modern therapeutic techniques: diagnosis pathologises the practices in question (Venn, 1998: 119), and its problematising function opens up discursive space for alternatives. Such alternatives can be suggested more or less explicitly as part of the practice, for instance, in the quote above from Joan we see a scale being used to mark out the degree of abnormality that warrants intervention: the degree of required change becomes self-evident against this neutral measure (Rose, 1990). But even without a measurement of the

problem, the utterance itself is significant. The announcing of a problem is a form of truth-telling, of saying the unsaid or unspeakable. The act produces a relation of power between the trainer and the trainee; it involves both 'listener' and 'teller' of truths. The listener is a witness and authority (Besley, 2009: 83), required because the speaking of a problem 'binds us to others at the very moment we affirm our identity' (Rose, 1990: 240).

Truth-telling has become increasingly ubiquitous in our everyday lives (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Swan, 2008, 2010b). Now considered by some to be a cornerstone of modern Western society (Foucault, 1998: 56; Diamond, 2011; Miller and Rose, 1990), 'verbalisation has become a central method through which people make themselves visible to themselves and to others, people come to know who they are through verbalisation' (Fejes and Dahlsted, 2013: 1). In organisations, truth-telling practices echo those of therapeutic practices in the way that they seek self-improvement. They have been recognised in performance appraisals (Townley, 1995: 119-120), skills training and management development (Swan, 2008; Swan, 2010b), and managerial 'personal effectiveness' (PE) training (Brewis, 1996). Its roots can be found in much older traditions: for instance, Foucault describes a process of reflection, diagnosis, and disclosure in the confessing, or avowal, practices in Catholicism. Confession requires individuals to manifest their subjectivity through verbalising self-analysis as 'truth-telling' (Landry, 2009: 119).

What is crucial to the truth-telling practices described above is a sidestepping of explicit self-analysis and avowal. This is achieved by either reversing the position of the trainee to make them the object of the acts under critique, or by mobilising what we might name the 'unethical other' in place of the self. The 'unethical other' is variously the organisation or another individual, and serves to position the trainee as one who is *already an inclusive subject*. The assumption is asserted that the trainee is already committed to accommodating the needs and preferences of others. By creating a time-loop and positioning the subject as already inclusive, the goodness of the self is safeguarded. That is, confessing via the third person circumvents the threat to one's self-concept (Giddens, 1991) as a good person. In diversity practitioner accounts, when confessions did occur in the first person they were described as being spontaneous and occasional – Joan talked about how trainees realised their own mistakes during the process: "People will leave the room and say 'I'm really sorry but I need to apologise to somebody'" – or as the remembering of a self that has been somehow been distorted: Gerry said, "they know what the right things to do are – I've just got to pull them out". Both Gerry and Ian attributed distortions of the good self to false information gleaned from the press: "I'd always take the view that it's about trying to get



people to think for themselves...and not be led by the nose...by [a popular newspaper in UK]" (Ian). This form of knowledge therefore imagines a duality in subjectivity: a stable core that is protected whilst its behavioural extremities may engage in change. Within this duality framing of the self, from the perspective of the subject, the avowal of a discrepancy between core and outer layers of the self, constitutes an 'un-learning' (Foucault, 2001: 495) of the knowledge that comes to obscure the foundational good-self; the inherently inclusive self.

A related practice, then, is the declaration of learning that is seen to be encouraged by trainers. At the end of a session, trainees were asked, collaboratively or privately, to declare what they had learnt during the session and what they still had to learn. This practice was not always verbal – I observed James and Emily asking trainees to speak aloud to the rest of the group, whereas Ava asked her trainees to draw a picture to illustrate the journey that they had taken during the training. In both cases, however, a declaration is made of having been in some way transformed. Joan talked about a trajectory of learning: "that's the thing that gets people to think about where they're at, to say 'everybody here today is at a different developmental level'". The acknowledgement that individuals usually either lack knowledge, or have perspectival knowledge (see Prado, 2000), builds the notion of fallibility into the subject. This idea that subjects are essentially lacking provides a platform for action.

The action that is recommended is also characterised by fallibility: rather than concrete rules of behaviour, the inclusive subject is encouraged to engage in a continual practice of fact-finding. In her use of case studies, Susanne was "not particularly interested in what you think the result was, whether the applicant won or not". In James and Emily's practice, too, "It became apparent that there are no right answers for these cases [...] Many of the conclusions from the trainees and diversity practitioners are, 'we need more information'" (field notes), and, Ava emphasised, "complexity and case-by-case judgements", avoiding "any procedures or outlines of things to do" (field notes). Learning is located at the level of behaviour and manifested in one's own research but also in asking questions: Rebecca asserted, for example, "what do you know until you've asked them? Just ask them for goodness sake! [...] it's convenient to put people in a box". The construction of difference in the other is that it is something as yet unknown, but which is ultimately knowable. This understanding simultaneously achieves a resistance to stereotyping and the prompting of action. The absence of specific, concrete advice about how to include others at first seems to echo Schwabenland and Tomlinson's (2015) findings that those doing diversity work express uncertainty about whether diversity is a concept that can truly be known and put into action.

However, where in these authors' study the notion seemed to cause anxiety, here the unknown compels the individual to act upon themselves.

Common again in these accounts of speaking practices was the circumventing of threat to the moral self of the trainee. In John's account this is made explicit, where the notion of inherent fallibility in the subject allowed for the creation of distance between the essentially moral self and the enactment of (im)moral behaviours:

"Is there anything wrong with asking questions? If you don't ask questions, you won't find out. If you make mistakes, as long as they're innocent mistakes at least you know you're learning something so don't be frightened of making mistakes, it doesn't make you a bad person as you may not know".

This approach likely responds to a legacy of training in the past around issues of organising difference in which it was felt that people were being asked to 'admit' their prejudices and to feel guilt, to which there was significant backlash (see Brown and Lawton, 1991: 26; Lasch-Quinn, 2001).

The connection made here between fallibility with the duality of the subject orients fact-finding toward two goals: a) the realignment of erroneous prejudgements with knowledge about others (fallibility of knowledge), and b) the realignment of knowledge and behaviours (fallibility in operationalising). The notion of intrinsic fallibility is valuable because it means that trainees are released from an experience of guilt or fear that had been a criticism with previous interventions associated with organising difference.

### Thinking practices

In this study, diversity practitioners were observed to encourage particular thinking practices to structure the way in which the inclusive subject should engage in the fact-finding outlined above. Some diversity practitioners drew upon the list of protected characteristics in UK equality law to structure a continual thought-process – Jamil recommended his trainees to "do a mini impact assessment [...] in your head" (field notes), and Ian explained "I've got like a list of...like a menu for each of the protected characteristics just to get people thinking you know". This structure appeared to follow a similar logic to a writing practice that takes place in public sector organisations known as Equality Analysis (EA), also known as Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA).<sup>7</sup> During the

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<sup>7</sup> See guidance at: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/plan/building-a-diverse-workforce/tools-and-resources/equality-analysis-and-equality-impact-assessments> accessed 30/07/2016.

study, it had been noted that EA played a significant role in the way that diversity practitioners perform in public sector organisations because the practice is used to demonstrate fulfilment of the 'due regard' aspects of the UK equality legislation outlined earlier. EA is a process whereby proposals for new services or policies are systematically evaluated with respect to how they might disproportionately disadvantage or benefit certain demographic groups within the target community. Differential impact is not always an impediment to the implementation of the proposed services but it is a key requirement that any imbalance has been considered as a means of promoting equality and of avoiding discrimination.<sup>8</sup> During the observed training, diversity practitioners invariably drew up a list of the protected characteristics to show their trainees. The list served as a resource for discussion of organisational and individual legal obligations, but it was also mobilised as a resource for how individuals could perform inclusion. Some proposed structures for inclusive thinking more implicitly: Isabelle talked about how the process of considering the needs of others did not necessarily need to be done on paper but could be performed through a series of conversations. The key unifier in these thinking practices was a notion of fallibility in one's initial reasoning. Jamil emphasised this in recommending that people "taking a couple more seconds to think about what you are going to say" (field notes). Within the framework of diversity training, the inclusive subject was therefore partly performed by the act of engaging in systematic thinking about the needs and preferences of others.

The practice of systematic thinking can be described as administrative in its inflection, ostensibly directing reflection outwards toward the needs and preferences of others rather than inward to one's values and beliefs. Foucault describes administration in the way that Seneca's 'evening examination' is performed. This reflective practice shifts the emphasis away from being judicial in character to being administrative through a language of 'mistakes' (*errores*) (Foucault, 1999: 'Seneca and evening examination', para. 6). In diversity training a similar shift away from a moral judgement of the self is achieved through a set of practices that are made necessary by the fallibility of the subject, and made possible by duality of it.

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<sup>8</sup> An EA 'tool' was frequently used to help perform this evaluation. The form of the tool varied but is commonly designed as a grid in which the protected characteristics are listed, and the assessor confirms that the impact on, and needs of people with each characteristic have been considered. This data draws on a review conducted whilst shadowing Harry. See for example: <http://www.calderstones.nhs.uk/media/files/Equality%20and%20Diversity/Equality%20Analysis%20and%20Impact%20Assessment%20Tool.pdf> accessed 30/07/2016.

A second thinking practice is concerned with the reasoning put forth for why trainees should seek to be more inclusive of others. Both of the classic cases for (re)organising difference discussed earlier in this paper – the social justice case and the business case – featured in the data in familiar forms, but an additional articulation of the business case was used: this was a form of business case that was narrowed to the individual by becoming attached to the employee's organisational role: Joan did this by reclaiming the acronym 'PC': "You know; people say it's 'political correctness' but we say no it's 'professional competence'. You're being paid to do this job and doing this job means that you thread equality and diversity through". Susanne likewise talked about learning how to deal with difference as being an important feature of customer service, "where you make sure that they don't treat disabled customers any differently to anybody else, you know?", and Charles made a connection with the competencies required by people working in courts: "[It's the] soft skills and the work that they're already doing in the court with vulnerable witnesses". In other words, in these accounts being inclusive of others was positioned as a professional skill.

This way of thinking about one's obligation to consider difference locates the inclusive subject within the professional domain and with one's success therein. Inclusion becomes a personal business-case, a method not only of improving conditions for others but also maintaining or improving one's own lot. The neoliberal subject is one who is motivated to act in pursuit of self-fulfilment (Miller and Rose, 1990: 24), and who is, crucially for this thinking practice, economically rational (Lemke, 2002). Comparing this with some of the subjectivities described in Foucault's work, this is radically different orientation to the concern for oneself in Greco-Roman and Christian practices where the moral self is central. It is different, too, to the subject constructed within the social justice case where the locus of obligation is achieving justice for the individual or for society. In a philosophical sense, though, it would be wrong to say that morality is lacking from the neoliberal subject; it can be argued that the morality of the neoliberal subject is one that is continually appropriated to align with the market (Bloom, 2017). This means that morality, albeit a different form, also remains central in the role-based business case.

It is worth noting here that a further element of the fact-finding practice involves the evocation of emotion. I have explored the techniques of how diversity practitioners sought to elicit emotion from trainees and why it is a vital part of equalities work (Brewis, 2017). Without repeating those arguments here, let us note for our purposes that the practice of evoking one's emotions adds to the construction of the inclusive subject in that

the inclusive subject is considered one who can, and should, strive to feel the pain of others in order to know them. This extends the notion of fallibility in one's knowledge of others to fallibility in the emotions that one feels for others. Ahmed (2014) has explored how particular emotions become attached to certain bodies over time and that these play a key role in reproducing racism. Reflection on one's feelings toward others, through seeking further information about their experiences, is both a thinking and an affective practice. Following Nussbaum (2003), we may also think of emotion as being part of thought.

### Writing practices

In the diversity training observed, there were fewer occasions on which trainees were asked to write, but where they were observed these practices were telling about the relation that the inclusive subject in diversity training has to one's obligations both to others and to oneself. At the end of training sessions, trainees were encouraged to write out future goals: James asked each of his trainees to start an action plan in a booklet that he provided, to which they would continue to add. Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013) term this style of writing a 'log-book'. Ava asked her trainees to write three things that they would like to achieve in the next three months but also paired up trainees asking them to agree to contact one another once the period had elapsed to check on their respective progress. These writing practices functioned to enact a pledge to oneself and to others to continue to learn and think about organising difference in the manner demonstrated in the training.

Exploring 'the arts of oneself' in Greco-Roman culture, Foucault describes how 'written notation of actions and thoughts' were an 'indispensable element of the ascetic life' (Foucault, 1999 'Hupomenata', para. 1-2). He shows that writing practices construct certain relations, either between oneself and the other, or in how the one is concerned with the self (Foucault, 2001). That is, that whether writing to another person or just for oneself, 'obliging oneself to write plays the role of a companion by giving rise of disapproval and to shame' (Foucault, 1999 'Hupomenata', para. 1-2). Writing is thus a way that one works upon oneself, fashions oneself, and improves oneself. Writing can represent a form of self-surveillance, that, in the case of the practices encouraged by diversity training, seek to mitigate the subject's innate fallibility. Texts such as the action plan enact the role of the other in holding the individual to account. In Ava's paired exercise this practice is reinforced through another individual, in conjunction with whom a mutual investment in the practice is declared.

The tangible document creates a lasting point of referral for the construction of subject. In this way, the writing practices described here create a relation of power that can operate 'at a distance' between the inscription and the trainee. Such practices position the subject as a project to be worked on and improved and to make the trainee responsible for this endeavour through 'the minute arts of self-scrutiny, self-evaluation, and self-regulation' (Rose, 1990: 222). The context in which these practices operate makes self-regulation a characteristic of the subject that is both possible and necessary. In the context of the contemporary Global North, the neoliberal vision of the subject dominates: people are regarded as autonomous and responsible (Rose and Miller, 2008: 18). This subjectivity favours a mode of influencing the construction of the subject that leverages internalisation; the construction of a population of self-regulating individuals (Dean, 2010). Foucault calls this the management of possibilities, that in attempting to 'govern', one seeks to 'structure the possible field of action of others' (1994b: 241). This is a particularly modern form of government, which Brewis (1996) describes as functioning through guidance of what we experience as free choice. This is achieved by making available, and making legitimate, certain forms of knowledge and certain forms of associated actions (Ahonen et al., 2014: 5; Lemke, 2002: 2). It is only through the illusion of freedom that the form of power has grip on the neoliberal subject.

Relatedly, the writing practices described echo the administrative orientation that we have seen throughout the practices of diversity training: writing externalises change, making it a fact-finding endeavour rather than, say, change in one's own beliefs or values. This is particularly important to the likely receptivity of trainees to diversity practitioners, because, as discussed above, practices of organising difference have previously suffered backlash for methods that have challenged people's thoughts, beliefs and values (Hemphill and Haines, 1997; Mobley and Payne, 1992). Through practices of the self that are administrative in inflection, the subject is understood to achieve self-mastery through the management of fallibility.

So, the way in which these writing practices orient one's obligation is through an accountability to oneself. There are different possible forms of knowledge about why it may be difficult for an individual to undertake a new practice of the self, and why one might need the aid of an 'other'. For Galen, according to Foucault, 'man loves himself too much to be able to cure himself of his passions by himself' (Foucault, 1994e: 96), but here, the rationale is instead centred in finding the time and space to continue the ways of being that are advocated in the training. Echoing previous findings (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2007), diversity practitioners said throughout the

study that they lacked time to engage with organisations. Perhaps from practical necessity too, then, the construction of a self-regulating inclusive subject affords diversity practitioners some influence beyond the training sessions themselves.

## Discussion

In this paper I have so far grappled with two questions: who is the 'inclusive subject' that is being imagined, sought and legitimised through diversity training in the UK? and, what are the conditions of possibility that shape the emergence of this subject? These questions were approached through an analysis of the practices of the self that encouraged in diversity training. In so doing, two forms of knowledge about the subject have been proposed to underlie it - duality and fallibility. I now consider what the implications of these forms of knowledge are with regards to the possibilities that this subject affords to marginalised groups struggling for recognition within organisations.

The main way in which the inclusive subject offers the possibility for change is in the positioning of practices akin to 'listening' *before* doing in approaching difference. Listening is an idea that critical race theorists have emphasised in response to the question of what members of privileged groups can do in response to inequality, and in the face of the damage that can be caused if action is taken before the change agent fully understands what is at stake (Ahmed, 2007a; Swan, 2017). The practices that form, and are formed by, the fallibility of the inclusive subject, are characterised by the creation of a space for practice before other actions. It attempts to teach this practice through systematising thinking and by setting up accountabilities. Moreover, in the notion of fallibility, difference is detached from the body of the other; that is, the idea that the other's needs and preferences can be assumed from their apparent characteristics of difference is resisted, responding to the problematic homogenising of social groups (Litvin, 1997).

Built upon duality, the less directly challenging practices of contemporary diversity training answer a legacy of resistance to past training. Two recurrent orientations to the self were noted during the analysis: self-regulation and administration, both of which are facilitated by an understanding of the self as layered. These were argued to be borne of context: on the one hand a national context in which neoliberal discourses of the subject have currency, and on the other a history of prior interventions around organising difference. A further advantage that duality offers as a form of knowledge is the way in which it reconciles a tension at the heart of the diversity

and inclusion discourses when linked together: the need to change oneself to accommodate others whilst upholding the concepts of respect for, or valuing of, diversity-heterogeneity. By setting up the notion of stability at the core of the subject, this particular construction of the inclusive subject offers a rationale for why other people's (differing) values need to be accommodated, and *can be* accommodated, whilst one's own values remain legitimate.

One might say, then, that there is a tension in diversity training between duality, as a form of knowledge that ostensibly protects the core self, and the very programme of knowledge provided by diversity practitioners through training. If seen as a programme, the forms of knowledge offered about the self would seek to discipline the individual at the most fundamental level, that is, to govern them from the inside; from the core (Dean, 1994). Alternatively, as Foucault has suggested in his analyses of Greco-Roman societies, practices of the self can offer a closer relation to Truth, representing the exercise of freedom through active engagement in self-formation. I would like to suggest that in the practices examined, we have a hybrid. On one hand, trainees are encouraged to engage in continual, and considered, learning about others and about themselves, which suggests an attempt to minimise the governing of the subject by forms of knowledge that marginalise certain people within organisations and society. On the other hand, these speaking, thinking and writing practices are somewhat directed by the knowledge offered in diversity training – by the knowledge of salient differences codified in the national law, and by the notions of duality and fallibility to the self. The ways in which we might wrestle with the ethics of the tensions of this hybrid deserves a full exploration beyond the scope of the present paper.

Whilst this framework of the inclusive subject opens some doors to change, it is unclear as to how effective it can be in keeping them open. Listening is a challenging practice for a number of reasons: where self-regulation is sought as a response to the conditions of limited time and resources in which diversity practitioners work with organisations, trainees also exist within the same organisations and are governed by the same logics that result in these restrictions. Unless inclusive practices are made fundamental parts of the way in which we understand the purpose of organising, it is difficult to see how opportunities for listening can be sustained. There are also contingencies that make the inclusive subject unstable. Recognising of course that no discourse can be fully complete, there are obvious points of rupture. First, the inability of duality to fully account for what happens when needs and preferences come into direct conflict and cannot be reconciled through pragmatic accommodation, or when a person's values are exclusive of other marginalised identities – are sexist, disablist,



racist, ageist and so on. Second, the connection between inclusion and professional competence retains the same contingency as the business case in its traditional form (Dickens, 2000), localised to the value that inclusion offers an individual within their organisational context. It gains currency, but loses universal application. And third, the attempt to systematise thinking about difference, drawing on the national equality legislation, makes visible certain differences over others and is at risk of oversimplifying the ways in which people differ from one another. It also positions difference as requiring management (see Ahonen et al., 2014) and as 'other' to a central white, male subject (Bendl, et al., 2009). Systematic thinking is also always at risk of becoming co-opted and fetishised as evidence of good practice in itself - as some diversity practices have been (Ahmed, 2007c: 597) - becoming a more detailed series of boxes to tick without genuinely considering whether proposed practices, policies or services can be more inclusive.

This inclusive subject also closes certain doors. The administrative relation to the self that one enacts as part of the dual and fallible self means that one evades the pain of challenging the individual's sense of moral goodness that has previously garnered backlash, but which is also the pain that is inevitable in fully acknowledging one's privilege and complicity in reproducing inequalities (Ahmed, 2014: 33). The practices of the inclusive subject give us distance from ourselves and predominantly seek to shape our core in relation to a neoliberal morality of individualism and self-fulfilment. Because such practices fight for survival within organisations, that is, conditions in which attempts to re-organise difference are often marginalised (such as, the work of diversity practitioners), arguments for redistribution of representation and/or resources are stripped of currency. Ultimately, this form of inclusion is bound within the confines of the existing market logics that dominate the national context and are unlikely to challenge deeply-rooted hierarchies of power and the concentration of capital.

In order to fully engage with the fundamental forms of knowledge about our subjectivity that limit the ways in which we are able to reimagine the organisation of difference, we may indeed do well to look toward Foucault's ethical framework in seeking a closer relation with Truth by turning toward oneself through reflexive practice (Foucault, 2001). By reflecting on our relation to obligation, to ourselves and to others, we might develop 'modes of thought and action that minimize[d] domination by these regimes' (Crane, et al., 2008: 17). What such a practice would look like in contemporary times, and in different geographical contexts, requires theorisation by

management and organisation scholars. Analyses of current subjectivities, as performed here, and reflections on historical alternatives, can help to facilitate such theorising.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to show how the inclusive subject is constructed through the practices of diversity training. In so doing, the analysis contributes to two main areas: Firstly, to the critical study of diversity, especially our understanding of the concept of 'inclusion', by examining how inclusive practice is being articulated at an individual level. I have delineated its conditions of possibility and considered what this means for marginalised groups within organisations. Secondly, the paper has contributed to wider management and organisational research by mobilising Foucault's 'later' writings to examine the ways in which practices of the self construct particular relations to Truth in the formation of a subject, thus developing its repertoire of utilities in the field.

As noted in the text, there are elements of the relations of the field that are not accounted for here: namely, forms of resistance on the part of trainees to the programmes of knowledge that they are being offered in training, and the ethics of the relations of discipline and government constructed by programmes of knowledge embedded in training. Furthermore, and importantly, whilst some of the forms of knowledge argued to be influential in the formation of the inclusive subject – such as discourses of the neoliberal subject – may span across varied geographical contexts, this commonality will be limited. The forms of knowledge discussed are specific to the local to the context in which the fieldwork was conducted, the UK, particularly in relation to the UK's legal framework around equalities and the history of interventions in organisations that were argued to be salient in the construction of the specific inclusive subject. It is important that further work strives to understand the ways in which inclusion is understood in practice across multiple contexts to enable theorising about the possibilities of how we might organise difference and the various struggles involved. Finally, we might also look for alternatives in how we engage in practices of listening within solidarity and activist communities.

Whilst the inclusive subject as is manifest in the data offers some space for change in organisational practices, it is problematic that it does not require individuals to acknowledge issues of privilege and unequal distribution of resources and representation. The lack of time and other resources faced by diversity practitioners are certainly barriers to their engagement with such issues in organisational settings. Although benevolent and born

of context, the particular construction of the inclusive subject found here is in danger of ultimately leaving power structures unaddressed and unchanged, with duality and fallibility locating responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

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The author has no relevant affiliations or conflicts to declare.

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Figure 1. 'Iceberg' model of the self

